



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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JOHN ROME'S ADDRESS TO THE HARVARD CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, 27 SEPTEMBER, 1993.

(in direct speech, not verbatim)

I believe all conflicts are fundamentally the same. They only differ in the numbers and weaponry involved. Twenty five years ago the Northern troubles began when the civil rights movement was beaten off the streets. Since then 3,300 people have been killed, and 30,000 maimed in a population of one and a half million. This casualty rate is equivalent to a half million people in the U.S. or 100,000 in the U.K.

The conflict is sometimes dismissed as a 17th century religious war or a normal condition for the "warring Irish". N.I. has the biggest church going population in western Europe yet 13 walls are needed to separate and protect the community. These walls are an indictment of us all. Our past attitudes have built them. We must examine in depth these attitudes. The conflict is deeper than a religious quarrel. It is a conflict of identities.

The challenge is to the majority tradition. They want to protect their own identity and way of life. I support this. Because they don't trust the other side to protect their way of life they want to hold all power in their own hands like the Afrikaaners and the Serbs. But if you have real faith in your identity no one can take it away. The nationalist mind set on the other hand looks to territory - "This is our land" - with a historical overlay of noble sacrifice in dying for your country. There is a great difference between dying and killing for your country. The IRA have killed six times more Irish people than the British army and the police combined.

I want the people of Ireland to live in peace and harmony. Territory has no rights, people have and the people are divided on how that right can be exercised. The solution can only be found in peace and negotiation.

Today there are hopeful signs. Ireland is a very different place to what it was in the 1920's when sovereignty was a major issue. Northern Ireland represents the failure of the two governments of the day to resolve their differences over sovereignty. Today shared sovereignty is the hope for the future. The greatest example of conflict resolution is the European Community. Fifty years ago 25 million people died in the European conflict. Europeans realised the need to accept their differences and to build institutions which reflected them but which allowed all to work the common ground.

Conflict is about the refusal to accept difference, seeing it as a threat rather than an enrichment. Difference should never be the cause of conflict.

~~SECRET~~ THE 16.129 IRISH CONSULATE BOST

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The problem is not confined to N.I.. It does not centre around who weilds power in the North. The three sets of relationships have to be sorted out by agreement. Any agreement must resolve the issue of sharing of the island. A Council of Ministers should represent the two administrations on the island. Meeting regularly decisions should be taken by agreement focusing on common interests. The Agreement should be put to the people North and South on the same day reassuring the Unionists that it is not a takeover bid and delivering on the self determination of the Irish people as a whole.

Derry which endured the greatest descrimination and violence has put this philosophy into practice in its local government. The Lord Mayor and the chairmanship of council committees rotate between the two communities. Democracy is not about majority rule but about consent and agreement. It is inclusive not exclusive.

Conor O'Riordan
28 September, 1993